

NSC BRIEF

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

1 DECEMBER 1955

BACKGROUND--FRANCE'S CABINET CRISIS

I. Size of 29 Nov opposing vote in French premier Faure's overthrow (319-219 against his motion to advance date of National Assembly elections to February) has made it possible for cabinet to dissolve Assembly. On 30 Nov, cabinet so decided.

A. Faure opposed by Communists, Socialists, Gaullist Social Republicans, and Mendes-France Radical Socialists and scattered conservative votes.

B. Opposition had not anticipated constitutional majority against government (312 votes).

Faure supported by Popular Republicans, most of rightists and other half of Radical Socialists.

Mendes-France forces still trying to block dissolution: already trying take advantage of anticipated delay in official announcement dissolution (to avoid holiday elections).

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A. Socialists and Radical Socialists attempting to ram through electoral reform to permit single-deputy districts.

B. Vote of censure to oust Faure may result.

III. If Faure wins out, he will use constitutional provision--for first time in history of IVth Republic--which permits cabinet to dissolve Assembly if two governments are overthrown by absolute majorities on formal votes of confidence within an 18-month period.

A. Mendes-France lost by 319-273 on 5 Feb '55.

B. When dissolution is officially decreed by President of France:

1. Faure government will remain in caretaker status.

2. Elections will be held within
20 to 30 days from official date
of Presidential decree.

3. 8 January likely date.

IV. Electoral system used in 1951 will
apply, i.e.:

A. Party lists in each department
rather than single-deputy districts.

B. Parties permitted to affiliate lists
so that their votes can be counted
as a unit.

C. Any party slate or affiliated slates
obtaining majority of votes cast
would get all the seats in the depart-
ment.

D. Otherwise, seats are divided by pro-
portional representation.

V. 1951 system, although originally adopted
in hope of cutting Communist strength,
is expected to favor PCF this time.

A. In many departments, Socialists may be forced to form alliances with Communists, to avoid their own elimination by center-right affiliated lists.

B. Affiliations between center and non-Communist left expected to be too weak to sweep in many departments, with result that proportional representation--favoring Communists--will apply.